



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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divertissements occurred. A *livret* published in 1873 makes it clear, however, that the famous masked ball was set in Act II, Scene 8, in this instance, when various “masked and disguised” figures danced in the spectacular ballroom. Other scenes surrounding these events took place in the gardens, which evidently form the background for the Clark pastel. In Scene 7 of this production, three of the principals sang the “trio des masques,” but this is wrongly identified in Williamstown 1987, p. 70, as the subject of *Entrance of the Masked Dancers*. Further details of these stagings are in Detroit–Philadelphia 2002–3, chap. 6.

21. Few costume designs for the dancers in *Don Juan* are preserved, though sketches for short hooded capes remarkably similar to those in *Entrance of the Masked Dancers* were made for the 1864 ballet *La Maschera* and may have been copied or recycled for the later production, as was the practice at this date. The designs are in the Bibliothèque de l’Opéra: ref. no. D. 216 (22), plates 43–45.
22. See note 11 above. These dates may relate to the beginning of Clapisson’s cataloguing process and do not therefore preclude the addition of subsequent works, though it seems likely that *Entrance of the Masked Dancers* was bought between 1879 and 1882. Clapisson refers to the picture as *Deux danseuses*, perhaps using his own description of its subject or conceivably a title proposed by the artist.
23. A letter of 24 Apr. 2001 from Caroline Durand-Ruel Godfroy in the Clark’s curatorial file has confirmed the purchase of the picture by Durand-Ruel in 1891.
24. Lecomte 1892, p.158: “sur la scène illuminée des blafards rayonnements électriques. . . . Haletantes, le corps en émoi . . . elles en ressurgiront de nouveau pour quelque gesticulation gracieuse et pénible. Par delà l’intimité calme de la coulisse, par delà le grand carré turbulent de la scène lumineuse.”
25. It was included in the historic exhibition of Impressionist works in the Grafton Galleries, London, in 1905 and in the Galerie Paul Rosenberg exhibition a few months before the artist’s death. Its appearance in Georges Lecomte’s and Richard Muther’s publications, and in the catalogue of the 1905 exhibition, ensured the work an extensive early exposure.
26. References in the Lemoisne provenance to the ownership of the picture by Robert Treat Paine (Lemoisne 1946–49, vol. 2, no. 527), and in Boggs and Maheux 1992, no. 20, p. 78, to its presence in the Georges Viau collection, appear to be unsubstantiated. After Paul Durand-Ruel’s death in 1922, the picture remained with the family until its sale to Clark in 1927.
27. Detroit–Philadelphia 2002–3, p.101.
28. According to the Durand-Ruel Archives, the painting was placed on deposit with Durand-Ruel, New York, on 30 Aug. 1926, and recorded in the Paris gallery on 28 Mar. 1927. Since it was not owned by the gallery, however, there is no mention in the gallery records of its

sale to Clark. See correspondence of 24 Apr. 2001 in the Clark’s curatorial file.

29. Joseph was Paul’s son, and was director of both the Paris and New York branches of the firm.
30. The illustration is labeled “Collection de M. G. Viau.” There is no other evidence, however, to suggest that the pastel was in the collection of Georges Viau.

113 | Portrait of a Man (Diego Martelli) c. 1879

White chalk and oil on panel, 40.9 x 32.2 cm
 Gift of Dorothy M. Skinner and John S. Cook
 2006.11

Portrait of a Man (Diego Martelli) is the most recent work by Degas to be added to the Clark’s collection of paintings. Uncharacteristic of the artist’s output as a physical object, untypical of his techniques, and lacking a complete historical provenance, this modest picture has nevertheless been accepted as an authentic work by Degas for almost half a century. A plausible candidate for its subject has also been proposed, though no explanation has been offered for Degas’s decision to depart from his usual working practices when making this study.

Degas’s traditional skills as a portraitist were already evident in his small *Self-Portrait* of 1857–58 (cat. 110), executed in Italy some two decades before the present work. Linked to a substantial group of drawings, paintings, and an etching of his own face from the same period, this canvas also echoed a long-established tradition of the portrait as self-reflection that reached back to the Renaissance. By the time he created *Portrait of a Man (Diego Martelli)*, Degas had turned his attention firmly toward the world of contemporary Paris and to the faces of the writers, musicians, fellow artists, and friends who now surrounded him. Such compositions were often radical in structure and handling, revealing his subjects in their casual surroundings and created in unconventional combinations of media that separated them from the modes of the distant and even recent past. Among the most audacious pictures of this kind were two large portraits of the Italian art critic and supporter of the avant-garde, Diego Martelli (1839–1896), executed by Degas about 1879.¹ Energetically painted in oil on canvas, these likenesses of Martelli were based



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on a group of drawings made from life, including at least three that incorporated white chalk.² Distinctive in both paintings and in the associated studies on paper is Martelli's relaxed position, as if captured in mid-conversation or while distracted from his writing.

Philippe Brame and Theodore Reff have proposed that the small work given to the Clark in 2006 is another study of Degas's Italian friend.³ Showing the same pronounced forehead, curving hairline, and coarse, unruly hair, as well as a somewhat portly figure and distracted manner, *Portrait of a Man (Diego Martelli)* was implicitly created at about the same time as the now famous canvases of the sitter. There are also reasons for considering it a slightly earlier study for these works

than those that have already been identified. Degas appears to have begun his composition in white chalk, sketching the sitter's position very loosely and without his normal attention to proportion and placement. The use of a thin wood panel (apparently unprimed) for such a sketch is extremely unusual in his oeuvre, as is Degas's subsequent decision to apply oil paint to this chalk draft. Now working with a brush, Degas reinforced some of his lines with dark, reddish brown paint and considerably developed the sitter's head, hair, and beard. Several such factors hint at spontaneity on the artist's part, as if he had seized materials that lay to hand and attempted to capture a casual pose while Martelli briefly stayed still. In the event,

Degas chose to reverse his sitter's position in the two large canvases, while retaining the subdued demeanor and slightly lowered head of the Clark study. RK

PROVENANCE [The Matthiesen Gallery, London]; Sir Edward and Lady Hulton, London (by 1957—until at least 1968); private collection, London; [Alex Reid & Lefevre, London, sold to Cook, 15 Aug. 1984, as *Portrait d'homme*]; John S. Cook, Oak Ridge, Tenn. (1984–2006, given to the Clark, as *Portrait of a Man*); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006.

EXHIBITIONS London 1957, no. 10; Wuppertal and others 1964–68, no. 9, as *Bildnis eines mannes [angeblich Degas' Freund Valpinçon]* (Rotterdam ed., no. 9, as *Mansportret*; Zurich ed., no. 11, as *Bildnis eines mannes [angeblich Degas' Freund Valpinçon]*).

REFERENCES Brame and Reff 1984, pp. 116–17, no. 106, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an unprimed mahogany panel 0.3 cm thick. The panel may have been thinned prior to the installation of the cradle, as only the top and bottom edges of the wood show a narrow strip of chamfering. The cradle has four molded-edge mahogany bars and four sliding slats, as well as extra glued mahogany sections alongside one of the center fixed bars, presumably to support a crack in the panel. There is no coating on the reverse of the panel. The panel has some wavy warping across the grain, seen especially at the top and bottom, possibly induced by the placement of the fixed cradle bars. A small chunk of wood is missing in the lower left corner. The surface of the panel shows extensive sanding or pumicing abrasion across the grain, as well as black paint remaining in the wood grain below the sanding marks. This suggests that the panel was previously used, perhaps having had another sketch on its surface. Old, possibly original, brown oil paint has been applied along some cracks, possibly with a palette knife. While this paint likely matched the mahogany in color when applied, it has now darkened.

There is no ground layer. Much of the white chalk used as the preliminary sketch layer, which would usually be absorbed into the oil medium as the image progressed, has survived due to the unfinished state of the image. Brown oil sketch lines can be seen on the shoulders and lapels, with a more complete oil sketch of the sitter's head. There are two drips of this brown paint near the proper left hand. There is no varnish.

1. L 519, 520.

2. For a summary of these drawings and their role in the painted portraits, see Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, pp. 312–16.

3. Brame and Reff 1984, p. 116. In Wuppertal and others 1964–68, the picture had previously been identified as a portrait of Degas's lifelong friend, Paul Valpinçon.

114 | **Dancers in the Classroom** c. 1880

Oil on canvas, 39.4 x 88.4 cm

Upper right: Degas

1955-562

Exceptionally lucid as a composition and bold as a pictorial invention, *Dancers in the Classroom* has often been cited among Degas's key achievements during the years of Impressionism. In a group of such works made around 1880, Degas asserted his claims as a painter of modern Paris, spelling out a familiarity with the commonplace characters and institutions of the city, and stressing the informal sensory encounters of a new age. The ballerinas in *Dancers in the Classroom*—like the laundresses, prostitutes, and cabaret singers of this same period—are finely observed and carefully particularized, celebrating Degas's technical mastery over the urban themes that now defined his reputation. Yet for all the painting's bravura qualities, examination shows that it was completed with difficulty, after substantial revisions to several of its figures and—most remarkably—the extension and restretching of the canvas itself. The picture's origins are also surprisingly uncertain: its date is unrecorded, the depicted site is insecurely located, and its first buyer has remained little known to the art world.

Dancers in the Classroom was painted when Degas's name had been publicly linked with the ballet classroom for almost a decade. From the early 1870s onward, he exhibited a succession of backstage pictures in diverse formats and on contrasting scales, followed by a more consistent sequence of canvases, among them two now titled *The Rehearsal* (The Frick Collection, New York; and Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Mass.).¹ Showing members of the Opéra corps de ballet at their daily exercise, this sequence was also united by its setting, a distinctively high, deep room with a row of tall windows along the principal wall.² Several of these works appeared at the Impressionist exhibitions of 1876, 1878, and 1879, where they rapidly found buyers and attracted largely favorable comment.³ Begun in the immediate aftermath of this success, the Clark *Dancers in the Classroom* and the closely related *Dance Lesson* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington,⁴ constituted a major new initiative at Degas's mid-career. Now choosing a pronounced horizontal rectangle, he launched a group of frieze-like pictures that can be seen as his first